

Set Sail Ministries

“Anchored in the Cross. Sailing by the Breath of the Spirit.”

Sermon Title: “Signs and Wonders”

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Text: Matthew 12:38-50

Date: December 17, 2006

Location: Aurora Alliance Church, Aurora, Colorado

Main Idea: Are we asking God for a sign in order to support our faith, or so we proof our unbelief.

INTRODUCTION

Good morning! Christmas is just a week away, and I hope that you are preparing your hearts to celebrate the birth of Jesus. One way that you can do that is by re-reading the story of the Jesus’ birth in the Bible. As I’ve read through it, one thing I’ve noticed is that there are a lot of signs that God gives to let people know that Jesus was born and that He was truly the Messiah that the Jews had been waiting for...but for the most part, the signs tend to be very subtle.

I mean, they weren’t very subtle for the people who were experiencing them!!: The angel visiting Mary and Joseph; the angels visiting the shepherds; the fulfillment of OT prophecy; the star in the sky that drew the attention of the wise men. But in the bigger picture they were subtle. God could have announced the birth of Jesus to the whole world at once, but He chose not too. It’s almost as if the signs were only given to those who were willing to accept them; to those whose hearts were in a condition to believe, who were truly seeking God.

Today, we are finishing up Matthew Chapter 12, and we are going to take a look at another situation involving Jesus and signs and we’ll see how people responded to them. If you would like to follow along, we’ll be starting in verse 38 of Matthew 12. You are welcome to follow along in your Bible or on the screens. I’ll be reading in the English Standard Version this morning.

Before we get into today’s message we need to go back to last week, and do a little review, because it’s important that we get the context correct. Last week, we saw Jesus healing a demon-possessed man. The demon had made the man blind and mute, and his friends brought him to Jesus. Jesus cast out the demon so that the man is able to see and speak. And it says that when the Pharisees “HEARD” about it, they tried to tell the people that he was casting out demons by the power of Satan rather than the power of God. And so it’s possible that they didn’t actually see this miracle, but they only heard about it. And so Jesus has some conversation with them which we discussed last week, and Jesus pretty much calls the Pharisees on the carpet for their un-Godly attitudes. And so that brings us to today’s message, starting in verse 38. There are 3 distinct parts in these verses and we are going to look at each of them on their own and then see how they fit together.

I. SIGN OF JONAH, vs 38-42

A. The request by the Pharisees

1. Their responsibility

Let me start by saying that the Pharisees weren’t necessarily wrong to ask for a sign. They were the religious leaders of their day and part of their responsibility was to test and see if someone claiming to be a prophet was from God or not.

The Greek word here that is translated as “sign” is translated about half the time as “sign” and half the time as “miracle”. And the Jewish religion was basically founded through signs and miracles. [Abraham and Sarah, Moses, Egypt, Wilderness, OT prophets.] The Jews were no stranger to signs and wonders or miracles. So they looked to see if someone claiming to be from God was able to do a miracle or not.

2. What they had already seen

However, if we step back and look at the bigger context for a minute we realize that just in these first 12 chapters of Matthew, there are a whole bunch of miracles that Jesus did:

He has healed diseases: leprosy, epilepsy, paralysis, blindness, lameness, deafness. Several passages say that he healed “all that came to Him”. He has restored a withered hand, he has caused the mute person to speak. He has cast out demons, he has calmed a storm on the sea, and he has raised a girl from the dead.

“All these the Pharisees have seen or at least heard multiple testimonies about...and they still want a sign?” Right from the start I think we can say that their problem wasn’t a lack of signs, it was an unwillingness to accept the signs they had already seen. They had seen plenty of signs...but they weren’t willing to believe them.

On another occasion, in Matthew 16, it says, “they asked him to show them a sign from heaven.” Apparently, raising someone from the dead wasn’t enough, they wanted Jesus to do some miracle in the sky that they could see, maybe make the Sun disappear, or make a storm come up by snapping his fingers. Basically they wanted Jesus to entertain them. Let me just state this real clearly: God does not exist for our entertainment. God has done all kinds of signs and wonders in the past and He still does them today (we have several testimonies here in our church of miraculous healing.) but He always has a purpose behind each one. And it’s not just to entertain us.

They wanted Jesus to entertain them and maybe to prove himself. This ties back in with Taylor’s sermon last week, where the Pharisees accused Jesus of doing miracles by the power of Satan. They are basically saying, “We’re not really sure how you are doing all these miracles, because you’re not “one of us”, you didn’t go to our seminary, **so we don’t understand where you get your power**, so we’ll set the rules, we’ll tell you what sign to do, and you do it and then we’ll believe.” Just like Satan tempted Jesus in the wilderness: “If you are the Son of God...prove it with a miracle.”

3. We do the same thing

It’s easy to look back in hindsight and be critical of the Pharisees...but don’t we do the same thing? Don’t we question God? Don’t we demand a miracle sometimes? I do. There are more times than I care to admit that I should step out on faith and I don’t. I ask God for yet another confirmation, another sign.

QUOTE: Life Application Bible: “Many people have said, “If I could just see a real miracle, then I could really believe in God.” But Jesus’ response to the Pharisees applies to us. We have plenty of evidence -- Jesus’ birth, death, resurrection, ascension [into Heaven] and...” the work that he does in each of the lives of those who know Him. “Instead of looking for additional evidence or miracles, accept what God has already given and move forward.”

Again, it’s not wrong to ask for a sign, but when God is raising people from the dead right in front of you, it’s time to believe!

4. Their question reveals their heart

I think what this is really showing us is the state of the Pharisees hearts. And the question I have is: with a heart like this, do you really think the Pharisees would have believed Jesus if he had actually performed a miracle right in front of them? No, probably not. They would have found some other excuse to not believe. Some reason why, what he did, wasn't enough. Again, their problem was not a lack of signs, it was unbelief.

B. The response from Jesus

1. Jesus reveals the condition of their hearts

So how does Jesus respond? Verse 39 **“An evil and adulterous generation seeks for a sign, but no sign will be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah.”**

Wow, that seems pretty harsh. **“an evil and adulterous generation.”** “Adultery” is a really interesting word to use. We know what physical adultery is and I'm sure it was happening in Jesus' day, but Jesus words here really go deeper than that. He's talking about **spiritual adultery**.

You see, God has always used marriage between a man and a woman as a model to demonstrate the relationship between Him and us. God considered the covenant that He made with the Jews in the Old Testament just like a marriage covenant.

And in fact all through the Bible, God talks about His relationship with us in terms of a **“love relationship”**. Jesus calls the church His “bride”. He says that when he comes back for us, he is coming back for his bride. Revelation 19:7 says, **“Let us rejoice and exult and give him the glory, for the marriage of the Lamb (it's talking about Jesus, the Lamb of God) has come, and his Bride has made herself ready.”** God desires an intimate, love relationship with us.

So it shouldn't be any surprise that when we break that relationship, **when we cheat on Him...** that He would accuse us of adultery. **This is exactly what Jesus is saying, “You guys have not been faithful in your relationship with God.”** It hurts him when we lust after other gods.

And the other gods can be a variety of things: sure they can be substance abuse or sexual immorality, but they can also be simply doing what you want to do and not caring about God. They could be being so busy trying to make more money that you don't have time to spend with Him. You can fill in the blank.

In the OT, the Jews cheated on God so much that he actually divorced them. Both Isaiah (50:1) and Jeremiah (3:8) say that God divorced Israel because they had been so completely unfaithful to Him, that they had committed spiritual adultery by following after many other gods rather than following Him with their whole heart. It says in Malachi (2:16) that God hates divorce. And do you know why I think He hates divorce?... **Because He is divorced.** God understands completely what it's like to be cheated on in a marriage. And he knows the pain that it causes and how ugly divorce can be.

The saddest part is what God says about why he divorced Israel: **“...this people draw near with their mouth and honor me with their lips, [but] their hearts are far from me...” (Isaiah 29:13).** It looked like Israel was doing okay. They were going to church every week, they were bringing the sacrifices that the law required, on the surface it looked like they were doing all the right things. But God looked at their heart, and they didn't even know Him. And hundreds of years later, the Pharisees were in the same place. It looked like they had it all together, but their hearts were nowhere near God.

If you get one thing this morning:

And yet, even after he divorced Israel...He continued to pursue her...and us. So much so that He sent Jesus to die for us. That's how much God loves us. And that's how he wants us to love Him. I can assure you, there is no other God like that. There are many other gods that people claim to follow...but there is no God like our God.

And to bring it back to our text, if the Pharisees had truly loved God with all their hearts, they wouldn't have needed a sign to prove who Jesus was. They wouldn't have needed a sign to see what God was doing.

2. Jesus answers their request...but in the future

So Jesus answers their request for a sign by saying, "watch and see." Because of the phrasing in this passage, it's easy to stop at: "no sign will be given." And we get the idea that Jesus doesn't really care about answering their request. But that is not what it says. Jesus doesn't deny an answer to their request, he simply delays it. He says, "You are going to get a sign. And if you are willing to believe it, it's going to be the biggest sign you have ever seen, because just like Jonah was in the belly of the whale for 3 days, and considered as good as dead, I'm going to be dead for 3 days...but then just like Jonah, God is going to resurrect me and bring me back to life."

3. Jesus continues to expose the condition of their hearts

Jesus continues on helping them see the true condition of their hearts, and basically says, "While we are talking a bout Jonah, let's talk a little more about the whole story." [DISCUSS: Jonah called to Nineveh; they weren't Jews but were Gentiles who don't know God but they repented] The reason I think Jesus mentions these, is that they were Gentiles, and yet they repented when they heard God's truth, and the Pharisees didn't. And Jesus is telling them clearly: "If the Ninevites, who had no understanding of God at all, repented, you guys have no excuse, because my preaching of truth is even greater than Jonah's."

And He gives the same example with the Queen of the South. She was a queen in another country when Solomon was King in Israel and she came a long way to talk with Solomon who was the wisest man on earth at the time. And again, Jesus is simply saying, "This woman searched out Solomon to hear his wisdom, but my wisdom is even greater than Solomon's and you don't believe me."

C. Application

We've seen the condition of the Pharisees heart and it is clearly not pleasing to God. So what kind of heart does please God? We've just talked about it: a heart that loves God with everything that it is. A heart that is passionately abandoned to God.

Before we move on, I want to ask you a couple of application questions:

- Have you been asking God for a sign?
- Have you been asking for a sign but ignoring the ones He has already given you?
- What is the condition of your heart? Are you loving God with everything you are? Or are you just coming to church on Sunday to fulfill your religious obligation and then you don't even think about God all week?

II. Unclean Spirits(demons), vs 43-45

A. Jesus teaches about casting out demons

So now Jesus goes back to do some teaching about demon possession, which is what He was doing before the Pharisees interrupted Him, but now He ties it right in with what he just told the Pharisees.

[READ VERSES 43-45 AGAIN]

At first glance, this passage appears a little disconcerting. It looks like casting out a demon is pointless because afterwards the person is worse off. But seeing as how Jesus himself has just cast out a demon, there must be something deeper here. The key word is “empty”.

We see that in the example, the person that has been healed is described as “swept and put in order,” but also, “empty”. The person looked really good on the outside. The demon is gone, along with whatever problems it was causing in the person’s life...but the person is still empty. Something is missing.

I think this is a great example of what it looks like when someone tries to clean up their life without Jesus. They get rid of the old stuff, maybe they do start doing some “religious” things...but if they don’t invite Jesus into their life to live there, then there is nothing to keep the demons from returning. Or maybe it’s what it looks like when we ask God for a miracle...but have no interest in committing to Him or getting to know Him.

Jesus says in John 14:23, **“If anyone loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him.”** Isn’t that an awesome picture of Jesus coming into our house and making it his home?

B. Jesus ties the teaching to the Jews of His generation

Jesus ends this part with **“So also will it be with this evil generation.”** He says, “You want your demons removed, you want your lives cleaned up, you want to be healed, and I can do all that...but you don’t want me. And the problem is: without me, you can’t have any of it. If you don’t open up your heart and let the Father and I and the Holy Spirit come into your life, even if I healed you, your condition afterwards will be worse than before.”

Jesus is saying, “DO YOU JUST WANT THE SIGN OR THE MIRALCE...OR DO YOU WANT ME?”

QUOTE: (Reformation Study Bible) “If people will not commit themselves to the King whose power they have experienced, their final state will be worse than if the kingdom had never come” to their lives.

A couple of questions:

- Have you experienced God’s power in your life? Has he brought healing to you, has he delivered you from the power of the enemy, has he freed you from things in your past? Good.
- Now, have you committed your life to Him? Are you living your life for God?
- Are you living your life with the first and greatest commandment in mind, to “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.”?
- Do you believe that he will fill you up where you were empty before?

III. Mother and Brothers, vs. 46-50

A. Jesus is interrupted

Now once again, Jesus gets interrupted.
[READ VERSES 46-50 AGAIN]

Right in the middle of teaching the people in obedience to God, his own mother and brothers interrupt him. It seems like Jesus' family was trying to keep him quiet. It says, **“While he was still speaking.”** So it seems that they interrupted him while he was teaching the people. Maybe trying to get him to stop opposing the Pharisees so boldly. In any case, here and in other passages, it seems that they weren't really sure if he was right or not. Even after all the signs that THEY had seen, they may not have been completely sure that He was from God.

Have any of you ever been interrupted or opposed by your own family because of how you follow Jesus? I'm sure we all have at some point. Sometimes my wife and I face that in how we raise our son, Joshua, when we have family or friends that have different ideas of how to raise kids than we do. But ultimately, we are responsible to God for how we parent, and not to anyone else, and if what God wants goes against what our family wants then we will choose God's way.

Jesus himself was doing the will of God. He says in John 14, **“The words I speak are not my own, but my Father who lives in me does his work through me.” (John 14:10 NLT)** and he wasn't going to be interrupted by his own family. But he uses this opportunity to illustrate a deeper point: **family relationships are very important and it's good to show love to our family and for children to obey their parents, but loving and obeying God, our Heavenly Father s always to come first in our lives.**

You may recall back in Matthew Chapter 10, Jesus said, **“Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me.” Matthew 10:37**

Again, that is a very strong statement. I think this quote can help put it in perspective: **“The believer's commitment to Christ is not for the purpose of minimizing the family, but to give God His rightful place: supremacy over our lives.”** Jesus taught in other places about how important the family was. He even chastised the Pharisees for not honoring their fathers and mothers. So he's not saying that we should ignore our family, but simply that our relationship with God has to take priority over everything else. **It's that important.**

You know we use the phrase sometimes: “The Family of God”. **I think Jesus makes a really neat contrast between our physical family and our spiritual family. For the Jews especially, the father was very dominant and central to the physical family. Jesus is saying that those who are united and connected to his Heavenly Father, who are doing God's will, are part of his spiritual family. And so we truly are family.**

CONCLUSION

We've covered a lot of verses this morning. If we step back and look at the big picture here, with all three parts together, what do we see?

1. We have the Pharisees demand for a special sign even after having seen all that Jesus had done already, and Jesus reply that they will get a sign, but they will have to wait.
2. Then we have Jesus' teaching that to simply be free of demonic influence and to have our lives cleaned up is not enough...we must be filled up with Jesus. Otherwise, we will remain empty and eventually be worse off than before.

3. And finally, Jesus admonition that more important than even our physical family relationships is that we go about our lives doing God's will rather than our own.

In every one of these situations, we see where people seem to be doing what is "right". But inside, their heart is far from God. As I thought about how to summarize this message, the verse that came to mind was in Revelation where Jesus tells the church from Laodicea, that **"I know your works: you are neither cold nor hot." You are lukewarm. (Rev. 3:15)** I think "lukewarm" really describes these people really well.

1. On the outside, the Pharisees looked pretty good. They did all the right things; they obeyed the rules; they were very "religious". But God looks at the heart. And their hearts showed that they didn't really love God at all.

2. The person that had a demon cast out and could now see and speak, looked really good. But without committing his life to Jesus, it wouldn't last.

3. Jesus' family thought they were doing what was right. They were trying to keep Jesus from becoming too radical. They wanted to keep Him within the bounds of what was socially acceptable. But their hearts weren't doing the will of God.

It's always been interesting to me that Jesus would actually prefer that we be spiritually cold, or in other words: not even have a relationship with Him, than to be lukewarm. But he greatly prefers that we be "hot". That we be passionate about Him, that we be madly in love with him

We started out talking about Christmas. Is Christmas all about Jesus for you? That's what this season is supposed to be about. It's not about wanting something from him, but rather accepting Him for who he is. As I talked to my wife about this she suggested that perhaps that is why he came as a baby: you can't make demands of a baby. I mean can you imagine the Pharisees gathered around the manger: "Jesus, give us a sign that you are the Messiah." And if they did and if Jesus could talk, he would probably say, "Look around: see the star, see the angels leading the shepherds here, see prophecy fulfilled. There are plenty of signs...if you are willing to believe. The question is: Are you looking for a sign or are you looking for me."

You can't make demands of a baby and you can't really be lukewarm either. It's kind of all or nothing. But you can love Him with all of your heart. I hope as we finish these last few days before Christmas, that you will put yourself in that place: the place of loving Jesus with all of your heart

I want to end today with a question of application:
Some of you have been sitting here this morning and God has been speaking to you. And maybe he has even given you some signs. And my question is how many signs is it going to take for you to believe God? I don't know your situation, and I certainly don't mean to make light of it. Some of you are undoubtedly facing very difficult circumstances right now. Make sure your heart is soft and willing to believe. Then trust Him to give you the right answer at the right time.

Who knows what Mary's life was like before the angel Gabriel came to her and said, "You're going to have a baby...by God." My guess is that as the reality of that news sunk in and people began to find out that she was pregnant...and not married...people who had not had an angel tell them it was all going to be okay, my guess is that there were moments when the miracle, the sign, that she had received didn't make much sense. But we know she was willing to believe: After the angel finished talking with her, she said, **"Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word."** **Luke 1:38** Can you say the same?